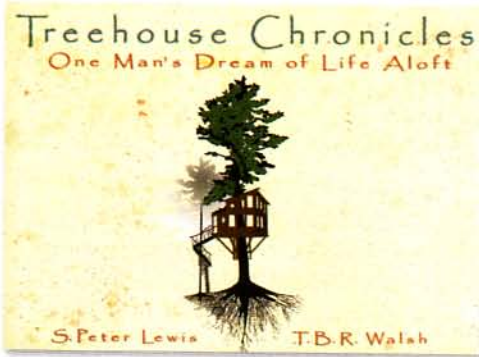


# A home—and dreams —hung in the sky

## TREEHOUSE CHRONICLES: One Man's Dream of Life Aloft

Text and photos by S. Peter Lewis  
Paintings and illustrations by T.B.R. Walsh

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*“There is nothing more patient than a tree. Nearly two centuries after it began life as a tiny sprout, the great tree stood waiting for a man to come along with an odd gleam in his eye, a bunch of tools, scrap lumber, and friends.”—Peter Lewis*

**R**EMEMBER THE SENSE as a child that you had found a kindred spirit in the pages of a book, and after a mere sentence, you had stepped into another world and were gloriously lost? That sort of reverie is still possible. *Treehouse Chronicles* utterly captivates and transports, invites one to lose all sense of time, and lifts the reader from the ground into the canopy, where nuthatches dance upside down and buildings simply float.

Ostensibly, this is the story of a timber-frame treehouse, its nearly four-year journey from premise to completion, and the fascinating details of how one goes about building and suspending a 6,000-lb. structure from a 150-year-old eastern white pine. Yet it is so much more. It is a testimony to the power of the imagination and of dreams, a meditation on the natural world, and an ode to family and place. Throughout it all is the reminder of what is possible when serendipity and process are allowed to work their magic.

In 1998, Peter Lewis and his family purchased an 1820s Cape on old farmland at the eastern edge of the White Mountains in Maine. The home sheltered five generations of a family named Hilton, once housed the community

library, and proudly retains its authentic and simple features. It is a place surrounded by history and the kind of quiet—sometimes broken by the cry of the loon—that allows dreams to step to the forefront. One hundred seventy-five feet away, a stone wall pauses at the base of a 150'-high trunk and then continues on its way. It is at this spot that Lewis “ran [his] hand over the deeply furrowed bark and began to dream.”

The result of that dream is a two-story building—complete with a coal stove—literally suspended from the giant pine, allowing the tree itself to be unharmed and free to continue on its merry way skyward. A flexible section of wall was even improvised using stout canvas and a #14 sailmaker’s needle to accommodate a branch wishing to exit the building. Ten cables—strung through a fork in the trunk, 37' off the ground—are attached to a hexagonal steel collar at the core of the structure. The building itself grows from six 250-lb. trusses; mortise and tenon joints, cut by hand, tie it all together. Diagrams in Lewis’s book reveal the inner workings of the structure; readers may feel compelled to pick up a chisel. Climbing gear, zip lines, and a main anchor 95' up the trunk enabled aerobic construction for the first half of the project.

The collective knowledge, skills, and labor of dedicated friends and three generations of Lewises transformed the dream into a three-dimensional reality. Friend and business partner Ted Walsh played an integral role in the overall design and execution, and contributed special touches, such as a collapsing drawbridge and a handmade chess board

with pieces sprung from carefully harvested branches. Lewis reminds us of the role fluidity and time played in the process as well. Even delays allowed for innovation to present itself, “during the slack tides where nothing much moved but imagination.”

Just as the treehouse was purposefully infused with “organic funkiness” from the surrounding forest, the book itself is a blend of lyrical prose, keen wit, whimsy, and visual delicacies. Walsh provides engaging and revealing glimpses into the building process and the natural world with hushed watercolor illustrations and informative pencil sketches. Lewis captures fungi-covered stumps and leaves edged with frost in his striking photographs. Sidebars about the natural world present themselves unexpectedly, inviting one to stop and pause before resuming the story, yet without ever leaving the main path. A pair of fall-hued maple leaves flutters between paragraphs. Somewhere along the way, one’s own flights of fancy begin to stir, no longer seeming far-fetched.

Winter’s final snowflakes were falling when I first read this book, rushing home in the evenings to pick up the story as it meandered through its own cycle of seasons. This spring, I took an entire day to reread it while sitting under an old apple tree as the buds were just beginning to open, and ants twisted along the clothesline. Autumn will soon be upon us, and while I know that regardless of temperature or surroundings, *Treehouse Chronicles* will transport and inspire, I will venture in again, in the fall by the sea, just to be sure.

—Jennifer Wilson McIntosh